



Testimony of
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HB 4322 / SB 189

On the behalf of the Van Buren County Methamphetamine Task Force I would like to thank Representative Tonya Schuitmaker for this opportunity to testify at this very important hearing. As many of you know Michigan has been infected by the Methamphetamine epidemic. The drug's contamination has started in Van Buren and other southwest Michigan counties with its characteristic west to east pattern of growth. Methamphetamines brings with it issues that we have never experienced before in the war against drugs.

Meth as it is commonly called brings with it a powerful addiction. Studies indicate that as many as 80% of first time users become addicted. The addicts become completely immersed in the sub-culture of Meth. They eventually choose meth over their careers, homes, and children. In the month of March, 32% of the substance abuse Child Protective Service cases in Van Buren County were meth related. One family worker shared with me that one of mothers she worked with spent the week prior to her last chance visit finding homes for her six children as opposed to giving up Meth. The outlook for those addicted to Meth is bleak. Successful recovery rates for meth addiction are only 4-6 percent. The Van Buren County Substance Abuse and the Van Buren County Jail have implemented a collaborative treatment program. The program addresses the need for the extended detoxification time as well as the criminal thinking of the Meth addicted inmates. This program has spent over \$152,857 in the last 18 months to treat those addicted to Meth with only seven Meth addicts successfully completing the program so far. Van Buren County Substance abuse has yet to have one person voluntarily enter treatment for Meth. This deadly drug not only brings with it the destruction of those addicted and their families, but also the environment.

The production of Meth creates 5-6 pounds of toxic waste that is dumped or buried along roadways, waterways or anywhere the "cooks" find convenient. This creates the potential for dangerous chemical exposure to adults and children as well as reducing property values. The toxic residue that is created when Meth is manufactured diminishes property values even further. The toxic residue penetrates porous surfaces that can be a hazard to families living or moving into the home. Conventional cleaning may not be

effective. Clean up and testing of the property is estimated to cost between \$5,000 and \$150,000. Under Michigan law the cost of clean up is the responsibility of the property owner and most insurance companies do not cover this expense due to the illegal drug activity.

Law enforcement in our county spends enormous amount of their time and energy on meth and meth related cases. Both the Van Buren County Sheriffs' office and the Michigan State Police Southwest Enforcement Team know as SWET state that 50% of the narcotics officers' time is spent investigating Meth cases. The Sheriffs' office estimates this to be a cost of \$182,727 annually to narcotics bureau. This does not include the cost of the road officers addressing the initial call as well as the related crimes such as assault, domestic violence, and theft. In 2004 Michigan State Police SWET responded to 27 Meth related incidents in Van Buren County alone with over half of the calls being "full blown" labs at an estimated cost of \$2,500 each. While narcotic officers are occupied addressing Meth related cases other drugs such as cocaine, crack and heron are going unchecked.

Our courts are also over run with Meth and Meth related cases. The Van Buren County prosecutor's office estimates that 30% of court cases are Meth and Meth related. The recidivism of Meth offenses is the worst of all drugs. It is not uncommon for offenders to be back in court on their second offense before the first offense has been resolved. Our state probation/parole office currently has over 245 meth related cases. Using the average cost per case of \$1,600. Meth related probation cases cost the State of Michigan \$392,000 in Van Buren County alone.

The actual cost of Methamphetamines is very difficult to calculate. There is very few social areas that meth does not touch. It not uncommon for one meth case to compile many cost factors such as law enforcement, fire fighters, EMTs, Department of Human Services, Children Protective Services, foster care, medical services, substance abuse treatment, jail, bank foreclosures, unpaid utilities, and/or tax sales of toxic property. The cost of meth to Van Buren County Residents very easily can be estimated at well over \$1,000,000 dollars a year. The meth epidemic continues to grow and spread. Van Buren and Kalamazoo Counties have already reached last year's total number of labs reported by law enforcement.

The Law Enforcement, Court Systems, Treatment services and the Van Buren Methamphetamine Task Force has fought diligently to combat the

epidemic. We have gained ground in educating our law enforcement, first responders and community. However, we continue to see the problem growing. D/Lt. Tony Saucedo of Michigan State Police reported that southwest Michigan for the year 2005 has experienced a 70% increase of Meth related incidences over 2004. Meth has also infected our schools. Van Buren County Substance Abuse prevention services states that 16.6% of the adolescents participating in the drug education class Towards No Drug Abuse report that they have used methamphetamines. Adolescents are not the only ones experiencing the effects of Meth. In a countywide survey conducted by Jeffery Green Ph.D of Evaluations & Measurements Inc. 16% of Van Buren residents report knowing someone who uses meth and 33% report knowing where to obtain meth.

The one thing that can greatly impact the growth of Methamphetamines is cutting off the supply of Pseudoephedrine. Many states have already passed legislation similar to the bill before you today. Oklahoma was the first state to impose such restrictions and has seen dramatic results. Some Oklahoma counties have seen as much as an 80% decrease in the number of Meth labs. However those states bordering Oklahoma have seen an increase in the number of Meth Labs.

The State of Indiana has also introduced legislation to restrict the access of Pseudoephedrine. Like Oklahoma, Indiana has momentum from a senseless death. A 10 year old girl was killed by man high on meth who at the time was living in a near by apartment complex. If Indiana were to restrict Pseudoephedrine before Michigan the counties bordering Indiana would experience a large increase in Meth related crimes including clandestine labs.

Many Van Buren County retailers have removed Pseudoephedrine products from their shelves. The manager of the local Felpausch store says they put the Pseudoephedrine products behind the pharmacy counter because they were being "robbed blind" they have had no customer complaints and one customer "even thanked us for being community conscious". Only one-area retailer who has put the Pseudoephedrine products in secure locations reports that they have "had a few complaints from customers". This reflects the county survey conducted by Jeffery Green Ph.D of Evaluations & Measurements Inc. that 71% of Van Buren Residents "Believe that retailers have an obligation to keep people from buying the ingredients needed to

make meth” and 79% “feel that Meth production is more serious a problem than meth use”.

Restricting the access of Pseudoephedrine is a powerfully effective way to dramatically reduce the number of Methamphetamines labs in Michigan as well as saving taxpayers millions of dollars. More importantly thousands of lives will be spared the devastation of losing loved ones to the very powerful addiction of Methamphetamines. On the behalf of the Van Buren County Methamphetamine Task Force I urge you to please pass the House Bill 4322 and Senate Bill 189.